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ABSTRACT

The changes necessary for creating a quality school can best be made in a positive organizational climate because any real change requires the active involvement of people in the organization, who will not participate unless they are highly satisfied with their work environment. Such an open, facilitating, nurturing environment can only be developed with leadership, staff support, willingness to take risks, and long-term commitment. Observation of organizations with successful climate improvement projects has led to development of the Roth/Hogan Model for Organizational Climate Improvement, involving the following 14 steps: gather informal data; determine the strength of your support system; make a commitment to the implementation of a comprehensive, systematic organizational climate improvement project; form a management committee; collect data; synthesize data; share data; prioritize short and long range projects; establish action committees; action committees develop action plans; management committee approves action plans; implement the plans; reassess--"How are we doing?"; and continue the process. Ideas and programs suggested by school climate action committees have included the following: faculty senate, student forum, parents' advisory council, Positive Peer influence, and weekend retreats for students and staff. (DCS)

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POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE: THE KEY TO QUALITY SCHOOLS

By Dan Hogan and Karen Roth

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During the last two years education has been barraged with a series of reports and studies calling for reforms and making recommendations to achieve excellence in our schools. Now that the dust is beginning to settle, the question is "Will our schools strive for qualitative differences or will they continue 'businessness as usual'?" It seems clear that "more of the same" (as some reports have suggested) and simple "band-aid" approaches are not the answers. What is needed is a comprehensive, systematic, visionary approach.

The current literature on excellence and change suggests that organizational climate is the pivotal point in bringing about the necessary changes to create a quality product. We also know that organizations are people and if change is going to take place, the people in the organization must be actively involved. You cannot bring about real change without their support and involvement. If people feel positive and have a high level of satisfaction with their work environment, they are more likely to facilitate change. On the other hand, if people find their work environment negative and unrewarding, they are less likely to become actively involved in the change process and may even sabotage it.

Based upon our work in a number of organizations, we have identified ten factors that consistently are found in

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innovative, positive organizations. They include:

1. High Morale
2. Respect
3. Activities nurturing social relationships
4. Emphasis on excellence (process and product)
5. Cohesiveness
6. Trust
7. Warmth
8. Involvement of all people
9. Effective Communication Channels
10. Attractive Physical Environment

These factors operate in an integrative manner within the structure and culture of the organization, creating an open, facilitating, nurturing environment.

But how does an organization begin to develop such a climate? It doesn't happen overnight. It takes a strong leader and supportive staff who are willing to take some risks and make a long term commitment.

After working with a number of organizations on successful organizational climate improvement projects, a pattern began to emerge. If people went through certain steps, they seemed to get to the "doing" stage where noticeable improvement in climate was realized. Interestingly, the model that we have designed was really developed "after the fact;" it was based on defining and describing the process that seemed to be working in places which were moving toward a more positive organizational environment. The steps in the Roth/Hogan Model for Organizational Climate Improvement are:

1. GATHER INFORMAL DATA

Our recommendation is that the principal take a day out of the office and, using the Roth/Hogan Preliminary Checklist, observe what is going on in your school. Talk with students, teachers, custodians, cafeteria workers, asking what they think are the strengths of the school and what are some of the wishes they have for the school. Observe the general condition of the building, inside and out. Be out in the halls during change of classes and in the cafeteria during lunch. This will give you a more focused picture of some of the strengths of the school and some areas that may need attention. Record this data.

2. DETERMINE THE STRENGTH OF YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM WITH THE CENTRAL OFFICE, BOARD OF EDUCATION, TEACHERS, STUDENTS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

Does open communication exist between you and these groups? What is the level of trust? Are you willing to take appropriate risks? If the answers to the above questions are yes, then proceed to Step 3. If the answers are no, then take time to develop your support system.

One of the reasons a support system is so important in a climate improvement project is

that it is a high risk venture. You don't know what you will find -- there will be some positive things, but there will also be some areas that need improvement or are lacking altogether. In order to make some of the recommended changes, you are going to need the support and help of others. You cannot do this alone.

3. MAKE A COMMITMENT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE, SYSTEMATIC ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

This is the most important step. Once you have made this commitment, there's no turning back. You take on the responsibility of making it happen, involving key people in leadership roles, sharing some of your power and decision making responsibilities with others.

You are also making a long range commitment. It takes two to five years to bring about meaningful change in an organization's climate and you never stop working on it.

4. FORM A MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The management committee is made up of representatives from administration, parents, professional and support staff and students. The committee's major responsibilities include managing the climate assessment, action plan

development, implementation and evaluation of the project.

5. COLLECT DATA

Collect hard data on the climate of your school from parents, students, professional and support staff, administrators in the school, as well as central office, using the Roth/Hogan Instructional Climate Assessment Instrument. You need to know how you are perceived by all of these people, and you need to know where you have to go. The hard data will give you a more accurate picture of both the "real" and the "ideal". It is interesting to note that the administrator usually views the school much more positively than any other group. This has been substantiated both in our work and in many other climate research projects.

6. COLLECT AND SYNTHESIZE DATA

The management committee takes all of this information and develops a comprehensive report, resulting in mean scores and bar graphs for each of the ten factors for each group based on what is (real) and how they would like it to be (ideal). You can clearly see where the perceptions are most similar and where there is most disagreement. This data also gives you solid evidence for determining future goals, based on real need, not hunches.

7. SHARE DATA

The picture that emerges is going to have both the strengths and weaknesses of the school -- what you're doing well and areas that need improvement, deficits that exist. This data must be shared objectively (not defensively) with each of the groups. It should be shared with the staff in a total staff meeting, allowing time for discussion of implications and opportunities with an understanding that this data will be a part of future goal setting. With students, it is recommended that you identify about 25 positive and negative leaders. Share the data with them, discuss implications and offer an invitation for their involvement in the action phase. Identify a representative parent group and do the same.

8. PRIORITIZE SHORT AND LONG RANGE PROJECTS

Discussion with each of the groups will result in many ideas and suggestions. This information is then prioritized by the management committee, using consensus, into the following categories:

a. In Building Projects

1) no cost

2) low cost

3) high cost

b. Projects Requiring External Approval

1) no cost

2) low cost

3) high cost

9. ESTABLISH ACTION COMMITTEES

Based upon interest, people from each group volunteer to serve on one of the three action committees. (Note: We recommend no more than three action committees operate at one time. This makes the project more focused and more manageable.) The focus of each committee is determined by the results of the data, group discussion and Step 8. There is a reason we chose the word action to describe these committees. So many times committees are formed, charges determined and then it's back to status quo. The committee never moves out of the talking stage. If an organizational climate improvement project is going to be successful, the action committees must be "doing" committees. Almost immediately there should be some tangible evidence that the climate is improving. This gives momentum to the project, enthuses the believers and supporters, but more importantly, encourages the "fence sitters" and "cynics" that maybe this time it will be different.

10. ACTION COMMITTEES DEVELOP ACTION PLANS

This is another important part of the Model. Committees are given "real power" to determine their direction, develop their action plan. They are a decision making group. The chairperson of each action committee sits on the Management Committee.

11. MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE APPROVES ACTION PLANS

The Management Committee serves as the check and balance as well as communication center. This committee approves the plan of each action committee.

12. IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

This is where the excitement and frustration begin -- excitement because it is usually "easier said than done." The people who serve as chairs of the action committees have the responsibility of clearing the way so the plan can be implemented and motivating the members of the committee to continue their commitment to the plan.

13. REASSESS -- "HOW ARE WE DOING?"

Have the projects that are being implemented had any impact on the ten factors of organizational climate? For many reasons it is important to measure the effect of the action plans. Just as the first assessment gave you data to develop your plans of action, a reassessment will let you know what needs to be continued, and other areas that

need attention. This reassessment should occur about eight months after the project has been underway, using the Roth/Hogan Organizational Climate Reassessment Instrument.

14. CONTINUE THE PROCESS

Organizational climate improvement is an on-going process. No school ever really arrives - it's something that is always being worked on. The above model continues to repeat itself with modifications as the need determines them. Being responsive to the current needs of the students is at the core of the model.

A variety of programs, responses have grown out of these action committees. Some suggestions are practical in nature and deal with remediating a physical technical problem such as the clocks that don't work or the halls that need new lighting. Others affect the organizational structure of the school. Let us look at some ideas/programs that have been implemented which have direct influence on the climate of the school.

Faculty Senate

The Faculty Senate consists of all professional staff (voting members) and all other adult employees (cooks, custodians, secretaries, etc.). The Faculty Senate elects its own officers, runs its own meetings, writes its own proposals, and does so instead of the traditional administrative run faculty meeting. This gives the members of the staff a direct

ownership in what happens in the school. It is not enough to say "you do it" or "you tell us what to do and we will do it." If a staff member has an idea and wants to push to get something done, all he/she has to do is write a proposal, present it, and politic to get it passed. The Faculty Senate embodies many, if not all, of the "10 Factors of Organizational Climate" mentioned earlier.

Student Forum

The students also need a forum to present and discuss their needs and desires. The Student Forum would be akin to the traditional "Student Council." The students meet every day with a teacher/facilitator, get academic credit, and likewise present proposals to the Faculty Senate for adoption. Again, it is a basic need of people to have some ownership in what goes on in their organization.

Parents' Advisory Council

Many parents want to be involved in what goes on in school but are not interested in the formality of the PTA, PTSA, or PTO groups. In one case, the faculty and administration had a large meeting of parents when things were not going very well and announced that they wanted parental input in the school. The action committee felt strongly that it could operate better with improved communication. They formed a Parents' Advisory Council. The parents elected three officers to run the meetings and stated clearly that they would like it to be informal. They meet once a month and the parents create their own agenda. The PAC has had direct input in many school rules and regulations, they have reviewed and critiqued the Course Description Book

causing many revisions, they work with the National Honor Society to provide free tutoring every Wednesday night, and they work with the administration, teachers, and students in presenting a PR program entitled "Southfield High School: A Place to Grow."

Positive Peer Influence (PPI)

PPI is a group process of peer counseling. There is a women's group and a men's group. They meet every day with a teacher/facilitator and receive one-half credit per semester. The group members are identified and recommended if they are positive or negative leaders and want to make their school a better place. Other students come to the group on request, recommendation or because they feel that there may be help for them. PPI groups saw almost 500 students in the last school year. The problems ranged from school truancy to pregnancy, from family problems to drug and alcohol addiction. Many student discipline problems are resolved in PPI without need for administrator intervention. PPI has proven to be one of the best action programs for improving the school climate. It gives a strong vehicle for communication at all levels.

Weekend Retreat - Students

To improve communication between students it was suggested that students from different cliques and groups go away on a weekend retreat. Staff members were asked to recommend positive and negative leaders. Students could nominate others or themselves to go. Then the staff, who run the retreat, meet

and try to come up with a balanced group of minority and white, male and female, and positive and negative leaders. About 50-55 students go each year. They are broken down into four small groups with two adults assigned to each group as facilitators. Then there are three days of rigorous "communication training" sessions (in small groups) along with a couple of large group exercises which tend to bring all participants together. This weekend retreat does great things to open up communication channels. The school takes on a new character after the weekend is over.

Weekend Retreat - Staff

This is similar to the student retreat. The staff members usually include someone from each occupation in the school (cooks, custodians, secretaries, teachers, aides, para-professionals and administrators). All meet together to discuss their perceptions of the school. "Communication training" is a central part of the workshop. Many really good ideas for a more positive school climate have eminated from these retreats.

Other ideas that have been implemented through action committees are Parent-Teacher Conferences in the Fall and Spring; free tutoring once a week sponsored and staffed by the National Honor Society and the Parents' Advisory Council; Southfield High School: A Place to Grow, a PR program put together by parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other staff members; Teacher Recognition Day sponsored and carried out by the student body (personal positive notes are

written for each and every teacher in the school building and presented along with a flower); Cluster meetings where the principal and other administrators meet with the staff on an informal basis each hour of a given day; and we end the year with a breakfast for every employee in the building. At this breakfast we give out (approximately 75) "Bonus Checks". This is a recognition certification, not really a negotiable check.

These are only a few ideas and programs that have been implemented as a result of a comprehensive, systematic, organizational climate improvement plan. It is our hope that this model and examples of programs and ideas for improving the organizational climate will stimulate your thinking and give you some direction, as you respond to the challenge for quality schools.

ROTH/HOGAN MODEL
FOR
ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT

1. Gather informal data.
2. Determine the strength of your support system.
3. Make a commitment to the implementation of a comprehensive, systematic organizational climate improvement project.
4. Form a management committee.
5. Collect data.
6. Compile and synthesize data.
7. Share data.
8. Prioritize short and long range projects.
9. Establish action committees.
10. Action committees develop action plans.
11. Management committee approves action plans.
12. Implement the plan.
13. Reassess - "How are we doing?"
14. Continue the process.

ROTH/HOGAN ACTION DESIGN FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT